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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1493

INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0200

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 004439

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR WALLER, LONDON FOR TSOU, NEA/ELA FOR SONTY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC PGOV PREL SY

SUBJECT: ARMED ASSAILANTS ATTACK U.S. EMBASSY, ONE LOCAL GUARD WOUNDED

¶1. (U) Summary: At least four assailants attacked the U.S. Embassy in Damascus at 1010 local time September 12, using grenades, gunfire and two apparent car bombs. One car exploded, but a van at the back gate did not. No U.S. Embassy personnel were injured, with the exception of a local guard who was injured by gunfire. The Embassy perimeter was not breached. Three of the attackers died, and a fourth attacker sustained injuries before being taken into custody by Syrian security officers, who responded quickly to the attack. There are reports that the driver of the van at the back gate escaped. The Embassy will function at reduced staffing for the rest of the day and tomorrow. An EAC cable will follow septel. End Summary.

¶2. (U) At 1010 local time, at least four armed attackers using grenades and gunfire attempted to explode two vehicles at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. A car bomb exploded near the front of the building, while a small van carrying a bomb crashed into the back gate but failed to detonate. There was a prolonged exchange of gunfire that lasted approximately 30 minutes. Three of the attackers were killed, and one injured attacker was arrested by Syrian security officers, who responded quickly to the attack. There are reports that the driver of the van at the back gate escaped. No U.S. Embassy personnel were injured and the attackers did not breach the security perimeter. One local guard, who was outside the building checking vehicles during the attack, suffered a gunshot wound and is in stable condition at a local hospital.

Another Embassy guard suffered shock. Both are being visited by the Embassy nurse. There may have been civilian casualties.

¶3. (U) The Marines reacted effectively. Embassy staff stayed in their offices until it became clear that a non-detonated bomb remained in the attacker's vehicle at the back gate. Then, after it had been determined that the perimeter was safe, non-essential Embassy personnel were evacuated from the Embassy and sent home. Syrian security disarmed and removed the explosive device. The Damascus Community School, which was scheduled to hold a half day today, was notified while the attack was still underway, went into lock-down, and then sent the students home. After the attack, Embassy security personnel found unexploded grenades, as well as body parts.

¶4. (U) The Embassy will function at reduced staffing for the rest of the day. Post is drafting a warden message, which we will clear with the Department as soon as possible. The Embassy initiated the telephone tree and held an EAC, which

will be reported septel.

15. (U) Charge met with Syrian Interior Minister Maj. Gen. Bassam Abdul Majeed in front of the Embassy as the Minister coordinated security operations. Abdul Majeed pledged all efforts to secure the location, including the establishment of a security cordon around the Embassy. The attacker who was arrested is providing information to Syrian security authorities, according to Abdul Majeed. Separately, Syrian Assistant FM Ahmad Arnous called the Charg to pledge full security to the Embassy.

16. (U) Embassy Spokesman is issuing the following statement: "The Embassy of the United States of America in Damascus, Syria, came under armed attack at approximately 10:10 a.m., local time, on September 12, 2006. All Embassy personnel and their family members are safe. One local Embassy guard was injured by gunfire and is in stable condition at a local hospital. The Embassy's Charge d'Affaires Michael Corbin, has met with Syrian Minister of Interior Bassam Abdul Majeed at the scene, and has spoken by phone with Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmad Arnous. The Syrian government has pledged full security cooperation."

CORBIN